

CHAPTER V: THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS

REASSESS THEIR STRATEGY

(September 1-7)

MILITARY ACTION

The intense campaign of military pressure against the Offshore Islands by the Chinese Communists was to taper off almost entirely during the first two days of September and then halt completely for a week. On September 1 the Chinese Communists fired only approximately 1,500 rounds against the Offshore Islands.¹ The pattern of fire until U.S. escorted convoys began on September 7 is indicated in Table 15. On September 1 the biggest surface engagement of the crisis took place near Quemoy as the Nationalists attempted to land supplies.* According to the Chinese Nationalists eleven Chinese Communist PT boats were sunk and one was damaged.^{2**} According to the People's Daily account of the same incident, the Chinese Nationalists at 9 p.m. on September 1 sent a patrol boat,

* For the first time in several days the Nationalists retaliated by firing 120 shells.

** There were no American ships in the vicinity and hence accounts of the engagement must be based on Chinese Nationalist sources.

Table 15

ARTILLERY FIRE: AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 8

Date	Chinese Communists	Chinese Nationalists
August 31	800	0
September 1	1350	3130
2	1530	150
3	300	0
4	210	110
5	0	608
6	0	60
7	0 ^a	0
8	53,310	0

SOURCE: Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Office of Intelligence Research and Analysis, Intelligence Report No. 7805, "Chronology of Taiwan Straits Developments, June 30-September 26, 1958," (Prepared by division of Research and Analysis for Far East), September 29, 1958 (Secret); CINCPAC Historical Division, "CINCPAC Taiwan Dairy," August 1958-December 1959 (formerly Top Secret, downgraded to Secret); TDC Daily SITREPS [Situation Reports], TDC file #3482 consisting of a daily telegram to CINCPAC, September 3, 1958 to October 17, 1958 (Secret). The three sources give somewhat different figures: where there were differences the CINCPAC figures were used.

^aFirst convoy.

a gun boat and four landing ships with supplies towards Quemoy, and the Chinese Communist Navy attacked the ships and drove them back.³ No supplies were landed.

On September 2 another naval encounter took place. A GRC convoy heading for the Quemoy beaches was attacked by Chinese Communist torpedo boats in the Quemoy Lialo Bay. The Chinese Nationalist Ministry of Defense said that the attack was beaten off, with five Chinese Communist torpedo boats sunk and six on fire. One GRC ship was damaged,⁴ and no supplies reached the garrison. Several attempts by the GRC to land a ship carrying troop reinforcements ended in failure.⁵ On September 3 a GRC convoy was turned back by Chinese Communist boats.⁶ On September 3 only approximately 300 rounds were fired. This was to fall off to 210 on September 4, and no fire on September 5, 6 and 7.

DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA

On September 1 the People's Daily reprinted the Pravda Observer article quoted above which gave strong support to the Chinese Communist position.⁷ The People's Daily on September 2 reported criticism in the West of the American position, citing statements by Senator Wayne Morse and an editorial in The Washington Post.⁸ Criticisms of the American position in the Western press were to be

reported by the People's Daily in some detail throughout the crisis. On September 3, broadcasts to Quemoy came to an abrupt halt.

On the next day the Chinese Communists announced an imposition of a twelve-mile limit around Communist China as the territorial waters of the Chinese Communist regime. This limit would include all of the Offshore Islands.* The Chinese Communist statement announcing the twelve-mile limit was issued as a formal declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China. It read as follows:

The Government of the People's Republic of China declares:

1. The breadth of the territorial sea of the People's Republic of China shall be twelve nautical miles. This provision applies to all territories of the People's Republic of China, including the Chinese mainland and its coastal islands, as well as Taiwan and its surrounding islands, the Penghu Islands, the Tungsha Islands, the Hsisha Islands, the Chungsha Islands, the Nansha Islands, and all other islands belonging to China which are separated from the mainland and its coastal islands by the high seas.

* The Chinese Communist intention to proclaim this limit had been foreshadowed the day before when the People's Daily of September 3 had given strong support to Iceland in its attempts to proclaim a twelve-mile limit in its fishing dispute with Great Britain.

2. China's territorial sea along the mainland and its coastal islands takes as its baseline the line composed of the straight lines connecting basepoints on the mainland coast and on the outermost of the coastal islands; the water area extending twelve nautical miles outward from this baseline is China's territorial sea. The water areas inside the baseline, including Pohai Bay and the Chiungchow Straits, are Chinese inland waters. The islands inside the baseline, including Tungyin Island, Kaoteng Island, the Matsu Islands, the Paichuan Islands, Wuchiu Island, the Greater and Lesser Quemoy Islands, Tatan Island, Erhtan Island and Tungting Island, are islands of the Chinese inland waters.

3. No foreign vessels for military use and no foreign aircraft may enter China's territorial sea and the air space above it without the permission of the Government of the People's Republic of China.

While navigating Chinese territorial sea, every foreign vessel must observe the relevant laws and regulations laid down by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

4. The principles provided in paragraphs 2 and 3 likewise apply to Taiwan and its surrounding islands, the Penghu Islands, the Tungsha Islands, the Hsisha Islands, the Chungsha Islands, the Nansha Islands, and all other islands belonging to China.

The Taiwan and Penghu areas are still occupied by the United States by armed force. This is an unlawful encroachment on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the People's Republic of China. Taiwan, Penghu and such other areas are yet to be recovered, and the Government of the People's Republic of China has the right to recover these areas by all suitable means at a suitable time. This is China's internal affair, in which no foreign interference is tolerated.⁹

The Chinese announcement of a twelve-mile limit may have been meant as a last warning to the United States to get its ships out of the vicinity of Quemoy. It also served the purpose of increasing the political cost to the United States of operating close to the Chinese coast.

In the first of a series of moves designed to present a different image of what was taking place and what the demands of the two sides were, the Chinese Communist Foreign Minister informed the Indian Ambassador that the shelling was in retaliation for GRC heavy bombardment while it was attempting to reinforce the islands with more troops.^{10*} ? uq?

The People's Daily on September 6 reported that the Supreme State Conference of the Chinese Communist Party was meeting and noted that Mao had called into session the 15th session of the Conference and that he had spoken first on both the domestic and foreign situation. His subject for the day focused on agriculture, the commune

* Apparently most of the Peking diplomatic colony, including specifically the Indian Ambassador, believed that the artillery attack on Quemoy was planned to divert U.S. and world attention from the Middle East, making it less likely that the United States would intervene in the (Iraqi) revolution.¹¹

systems and the militia. It was reported in the People's Daily that the Conference would continue on the following day with a report on the second five-year plan, a report on finance and commerce, a report on education, and finally a report by Communist Chinese Premier Chou En-lai on foreign policy.¹²

The story gave the impression that no major crisis in foreign policy was currently facing China since the meeting was devoted largely to domestic affairs.

On September 5, Pravda in an Observer article made the strongest statement that it had made so far during the crisis saying that the Soviet Union could not "stand idly by" if things happened "at the frontier or on the territory of its great ally." The Pravda statement declared that the Chinese Communist intention to liberate the Offshore Islands was lawful and just, but made a sharp distinction between operations involving the Offshore Islands and those against the mainland.* It declared that an attack on the mainland would cause the Soviet

*On September 4, the British Ambassador to Russia was told by a Soviet official that the recovery of the Offshore Islands and Taiwan was an internal affair of the Chinese. The British official reported that the Soviet attitude was uncompromising but that it did not give the impression that the Soviets were expecting an acute crisis in the near future.¹³

Union to help the Chinese Communists. The article asserted that:

the Soviet Union cannot remain indifferent to events on the border or territory of its great ally. The Soviet Union will not sit by quietly while U.S. military preparations unfold in the Pacific, whose waters also wash Soviet shores. Bound to the Chinese People's Republic by ties of fraternal friendship and mutual aid, the Soviet people will give their brothers the Chinese people all possible aid to curb the adventurous warmongers, who have lost all sense of decency and reason.

The instigators and organizers of this latest military venture in the Far East should not calculate that a retaliatory blow will be confined to the Taiwan Strait and no less the offshore island. They will receive a crushing rebuff, which will put an end to U.S. military aggression in the Far East.¹⁴

On September 6, another Soviet newspaper, Krasnaya Zvezda, warned the United States to keep hands off

Communist China. "A retaliatory blow against the aggressors will not be limited to the area of their provocation."¹⁵

On the same day, the People's Daily repeated Pravda's warning statement of September 5. The story was displayed prominently on page 1 and the document reprinted in its entirety on page 4.

According to a report in the People's Daily of September 7, a telegram from the Fukien front on September 6 had indicated that the Chinese Communist Army on the front,

in order to give the Chinese Nationalist troops on Quemoy a chance to repent, took the initiative on September 4 to stop the bombardment against Quemoy, and, in fact, the People's Daily report stated that no shells had been fired on September 4 or 5. It noted, however, that rather than repenting, Chiang Kai-shek's armies had used this opportunity to try to transport material by plane and ship to the Islands and that against this "unconscionable action of Chiang's army the frontline soldiers were angry and could not tolerate this."¹⁶ Despite the hint in the story that shelling had been resumed, the cease-fire remained in effect, as noted, until September 8.

During the first week of September the coverage of the crisis in Peking increased. There continued, however, to be little direct comment or reporting of the military activities and most the reports were from the foreign press. The campaign was, however, still small in comparison to the communes and the increasing steel output campaigns, and that there was no mention of an early liberation of Taiwan. There were no public demonstrations in connection with the crisis.¹⁷

On the 6th, Chinese Communist Premier Chou En-lai issued a statement offering to resume the Sino-American

talks. It will be recalled that the United States had been pressing for some time prior to, and since, the opening of the crisis for resumption of the talks and that the Chinese Communists had received several letters from American officials in Europe requesting an opening of the Sino-American talks.* The United States had stated that it was prepared to resume the talks at the ambassadorial level, which had been the only condition established by the Chinese Communists when they had broken off the talks. The Chou statement declared that the Dulles Newport statement** seriously jeopardized "the peace of the Far East and the world." It went on to declare that Taiwan was a part of China and the U.S. presence on Taiwan was illegal. Turning to the Offshore Islands, Chou declared that they were being used "as advance bases for conducting all sorts of harassing and disruptive activities." He asserted that China had "every right to . . . take necessary military action against . . . troops entrenched on the coastal islands" and that the United States had no right to intervene. The statement asserted that U.S. intervention was

* See above, pp. 60-61.

** See below, pp. 230-232.

provocative. Separating the Offshore Islands from Taiwan, the Chinese Communist leader stated that:

The Chinese people's determination to liberate their own territory of Taiwan and the Penghu Islands is unshakable. In particular the Chinese people cannot tolerate the presence in their inland waters along the mainland of an immediate threat posed by such coastal islands as Quemoy and Matsu.

Chou then turned to the proposal to resume the ambassadorial talks:

. . . . After the Chinese Government demanded in July this year that the [Sino-American] talks be resumed within a set time limit, the U.S. Government did not make a timely reply, but it has ultimately designated a representative of ambassadorial rank. Now, the U.S. Government again indicates its desire to settle the Sino-American dispute in China's Taiwan area through peaceful negotiation. To make a further effort to safeguard peace, the Chinese Government is prepared to resume the ambassadorial talks between the two countries. But the danger of war created by the United States in China's Taiwan area has not been reduced thereby. In view of the fact that the U.S. Government often acts differently from what it says and often uses peaceful negotiation as a smokescreen to cover up its actual deed of continuously expanding aggression, the entire Chinese people and the peace-loving people all over the world must not relax in the least their struggle against U.S. interference in China's internal affairs and against U.S. threat to the peace of the Far East and the world.¹⁸

The People's Daily, which printed the Chou statement under a banner headline and devoted three-quarters of its September 7th issue to Taiwan, also reported that a

"Liberate Taiwan and the Offshore Islands Campaign" had begun in public meetings everywhere throughout China.

The Chou statement represented part of the Chinese Communist effort to disengage and to take a new course from their original strategy, which had failed, but it was clear that it did not reflect a definitive decision as to which way to move. (The Chinese Communist statements at the Warsaw talks indicated that they never intended to use these for serious negotiation.)* In addition, while Chou made a public statement on September 6, the Chinese Communists, for a number of days before, were making the contacts in Warsaw necessary to get the talks going. The Chou statement seemed to be a stop-gap movement designed to reduce the likelihood that the United States would over-react. While it was clear to the Chinese Communists that the United States was not going to be militarily inactive, the extent of U.S. involvement was not clear, and particularly they did not know how far in the United States would escort Chinese Nationalist ships. Accordingly, they did not know whether it would be possible to resume artillery fire. The Chinese Communists, however,

* See below, pp. 441-446.

did know that they could no longer use PT boats to attack Nationalist supply ships, and hence their original strategy for interdiction of Quemoy, by a combination of naval and artillery action had to be given up. They did not know, however, if they could resume artillery fire without hitting U.S. ships and were probably uncertain as to the effectiveness of a pure artillery campaign.

CHINESE COMMUNIST STRATEGY

It would appear that by September 2, the Chinese Communists had come to the reluctant conclusion that the United States was neither going to force the Chinese Nationalists to abandon the Offshore Islands nor stand aside and allow the Chinese Communists to impose a successful blockade against GRC forces. Certainly by the time of Dulles' Newport statement, but probably before that, the Chinese Communists had sufficient evidence that the United States was going to be involved in the defense of the Offshore Islands.

During the first week in August, there was a very substantial increase in American military efforts in the Far East in general and in the Taiwan Straits in particular which were clearly visible to and closely followed by the

Chinese Communists.* By the end of August the American Taiwan Fleet had been substantially increased in size, ships were sailing up and down the Straits, and planes flying up and down closely followed on Chinese Communist radar. In addition, diplomatically the United States had on August 24 finally complied with the Chinese Nationalist request for a public statement expressing its interest in the Offshore Islands. Following the resumption of fire, there had been a series of other statements by Eisenhower, Smoot, McElroy, Secretary of the Army Wilber M. Brucker, and others climaxing with Dulles' Newport statement.** In addition there was nothing to suggest plans for an American pullback or any evidence that the United States was urging the Chinese Nationalists to withdraw from the Offshore Islands. Though the Chinese Communists obviously could not be certain that the United States was not pressuring the Chinese Nationalists to withdraw from Quemoy, the extensive American build-up, coupled with the fact that there were no reports out of either Taiwan or Washington of such moves, and the fact that U.S.-GRC relations seemed

* Cf. Table 9, p. 65 with Table 13, pp. 134-136.

** These public moves by the United States are discussed in Chapter VI, pp. 228-236.

to be functioning very smoothly would add up to a strong possibility that there was no American pressure of this kind, as in fact there was not.

Thus by early September the American failure to comply with the Chinese Communists' expectations must have been clear. The Chinese in their actions showed that their strategy was about to change. Militarily the amount of artillery fire went down and then came to a complete halt. Other military action was substantially reduced. Diplomatically they continued to play down the importance of the events in the Taiwan Straits. During this period the Chinese were clearly waiting to see to what extent the United States would intervene and were probably searching for a way to disguise their anticipated withdrawal. They were not sure whether the United States would escort all the way in, although they could tell by preparations going on in the Straits that escort operations were about to start.

The Chou statement marked a turning point in the crisis for the Chinese Communists and was part of the effort to disengage but at the same time to adopt a new strategy. Their later actions in Warsaw suggest that the Chinese Communists never expected the talks themselves to

to play a serious role. Rather the Chou statement seemed to be a stop-gap move designed to reduce the likelihood that the United States would over-react and authorize bombing of the mainland. Without being certain of the extent of U.S. escort and military involvement, the Chinese did know that their original strategy of using PT boats and perhaps planes as well as artillery fire could not be implemented. But they could not know whether they would be able to resume artillery fire and, if so, whether it would be successful. Their calculations probably led them to believe that artillery fire alone would not be successful and even if it were, would probably lead to greater U.S. involvement. Thus, at this point in early September, Peking probably did not anticipate the imposition of a successful blockade, although this obviously could not be completely ruled out. The Chinese Communists may have hoped that the pressure from Khrushchev's forthcoming letter to Eisenhower and the increasing international and domestic opposition to American policy would lead to American pressure on the Nationalists to evacuate Quemoy.